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AUTHOR McCadden, Joseph F.
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ABSTRACT

The team-teaching component of the College Skills Program at Burlington County College (New Jersey), a coordinated cognitive and affective curriculum for remediating basic skills deficiencies, is briefly described. Four-person teams consisting of a social sciences teacher, a reading teacher, an English teacher, and a counselor are used in the program. Sections of this report describe the program in general, the role and experiences of the team members, the structure of the program, and initial difficulties in implementation which had to be overcome. An address is provided for further information. (DC)

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TEAM-TEACHING: QUALITY CIRCLES FOR TEACHERS

by Joseph F. McCadden

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TEAM-TEACHING: QUALITY CIRCLES FOR TEACHERS

Burlington County College has developed an innovative approach in its College Skills Program. This approach, the team-teaching of a coordinated cognitive and affective curriculum, is the primary reason for the success of the College Skills Program. (Our studies indicate that College Skills students have higher grade point averages in their regular college courses than do students who entered the college with no basic skills deficiencies.) The purpose of the team-teaching approach is to foster a carefully coordinated curriculum that teaches students the reading, writing, reasoning and study skills that are essential for success in the regular college curriculum. *Each team, which includes a Social Science, Reading, and English teacher as well as a counselor, works together to reinforce what is being taught in one another's classes, to apply what is being learned in other classes to their own, and to deal collaboratively with instructional problems.* The reading teachers, for instance, help the students comprehend the reading material assigned in the social science classes, and both the reading and social science professors coordinate their writing assignments with the English teacher. The goal is to have students consistently apply the skills learned in one course to the assignments in other classes.

Role of the Faculty

The key to a successful program is selecting faculty members who are (1) capable of working cooperatively with colleagues, (2) able to respond intelligently and constructively to criticism, and (3) comfortable with peer evaluation. *Faculty members working in the program unanimously feel that team membership makes them better teachers.* One teacher said, "Team teaching made me excited about teaching again. Working in isolation, a faculty member can become--unknowingly sometimes--complacent. In contrast, working on a team requires the faculty member to be on his toes and to know the students individually. The team demands that the faculty members look at students in totality. I like the give and take, criticism, and openness of team discussions that make me keenly aware of teaching behavior."

Another faculty member feels that participation on a team provides a "window into other disciplines" that is simply not available when a faculty member is working by herself, even though other faculty members might be teaching the same course. One team member pointed out, "Recognizing that students did well in one class and not in another helped me to respond creatively to my work." Many faculty members think that teamwork helps broaden their perspective on students and the instructional process. Team membership "makes faculty members more aware of how the subject matter and skills in one course relate directly to their own courses."

During interviews about their team experiences, faculty members talk about the supportive attitude of their peers, and the feeling of cooperation in a shared venture. No one complains that his or her integrity is compromised because of pressure from other team members. Faculty new to the college felt that the team teaching has had a "maturing effect" and helped them feel an integral part of the college. Team membership increases accountability. One faculty member said, "There is a high degree of accountability to other team members to do your share of the work. Working on a team forces individual teachers to work out difficulties in human relationships that could destroy the effectiveness of the total efforts. It is impossible to dismiss another faculty member's point-of-view and walk away. Instead, everyone must make a real effort to get along, to tap each other's humanity."

Program in Community College Education, The University of Texas at Austin, EDB 348, Austin, Texas 78712

Participating on a team also helps to alleviate the frustration involved when teaching developmental students, if for no other reason than the camaraderie nurtured by a common experience. "Working closely and continually with others is emotionally draining but also emotionally exhilarating, particularly when the group is able to see that it is doing its task with greater competency from one year to the next."

The team concept extends even to students who are expected to become active partners in the College Skills Program. In Social and Academic Skills 101, the students probe why they have not succeeded in high school and what changes they need to make to be successful in college. In these classes, students and teachers discuss workloads, teaching styles and grading.

Structure of Program

In order to be successful, the team approach to teaching the basic skills requires careful placement of students. On the basis of their performance, students are placed on one of three levels of the program and assigned to a team. The four faculty team members, who might also be assisted by tutors and counseling specialists, teach four sections, comprising anywhere from 70 to 100 students. Each of the three teams meets weekly for two hours to discuss the effectiveness of the curriculum and the learning difficulties of students. These meetings are essential in order to continually examine the instructional program, keep the team members aware of what is going on in other classes, and plan for future activities and projects. Faculty members also discuss the effectiveness of their classes and ways to improve them. Occasionally, disruptive or failing students are asked to come to the team meeting so that their problems can be discussed with the team.

Overcoming Initial Implementation Difficulties

Creating the team-centered program was a difficult process. Some faculty members, although dedicated to developmental education, found it difficult to work effectively with other teachers and left the program. During our first year of implementation, one team almost disintegrated because of high absenteeism at weekly team meetings. After that, five faculty members were recruited with the clear expectation that successful team membership was crucial to their continued employment. To create rapport among the new faculty members and the tenured faculty who had joint appointments with other divisions, management consultants were engaged to conduct team building workshops. With these consultants, the faculty examined the hidden obstacles to cross-discipline cooperation and became more aware of the complexities involved in interpersonal communication. They explored their perceptions of one another in order to develop the trusting relationships necessary for successful instructional teams. Finally, they learned how important listening is to cooperative endeavors.

The entrance and exit competencies among the three-level program had to be synchronized by developing competency-based instructional goals for all courses. The courses were also revised after the first year, based on the responses of students and other team members. In order to ensure that students were placed accurately, a retesting program, which included a reading and a writing sample, was initiated. The team had to overcome the tendency to blame other team members whenever a difficulty in the instructional program occurred or to blame students for failure in a particular course.

We feel that the benefits of team-teaching justify the difficulty experienced in organizing cross-divisional teams--especially for high risk students. *To be successfully implemented, team teaching does need sophisticated and strong administrative support that takes into account the complexity of the task being undertaken.*

Joseph F. McCadden

For further information, contact Dr. Joseph F. McCadden, Coordinator of the College Skills Program, Burlington County College, Pemberton, New Jersey 08068.

KAREN WATKINS, EDITOR
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